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SUBJECT: E-PRT FALLUJAH: AUTUMN VIOLENCE FUELS PUBLIC CONCERN IN FALLUJAH

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Robert Ford, reasons 1.4 (b, d)

¶1. (U) This is the final e-PRT Anbar 1 (Fallujah) cable.

¶2. (C) SUMMARY AND COMMENT. As the embedded PRT (e-PRT) in Fallujah prepared to close in mid-November, e-PRTOffs held a series of farewell meetings with various local partners. They heard a common theme of rising anxiety from renewed violence and instability, especially a string of bomb attacks in October. They attributed the rising violence in large part to the upcoming election period and the drawdown of US forces. Some of the violence they also blamed on criminal and political elements rather than terrorists. The perceptions the team heard contrast sharply with statistical data that suggest that the number of attacks in the Fallujah area changed little during 2009, and the security situation was far better than it was several years earlier. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

STRING OF ATTACKS RATTLES PUBLIC CALM

¶3. (C) After enjoying a long period of relative quiet, many greater Fallujah area residents were rattled by a series of high-profile attacks within the province in October and November. Many attacks were in the surrounding sub-districts of Saqlawiya, Ameriyah-Ferris, and Garma, as well as just over the provincial border in Abu Ghraib. According to e-PRT contacts, these autumn attacks were starting to affect Fallujans, perspectives regarding security and freedom of movement.

SPECTACULAR, DEADLY ATTACKS IN OCTOBER, NOVEMBER

¶4. (C) Between early October and late November, there were over a dozen significant attacks in and around Fallujah that resulted in multiple injuries and/or deaths. Among the most disturbing was the mass shooting and beheading of 13 Sunni males in nearby Abu Ghraib by militants dressed in Iraqi police uniforms on November 16. Other major attacks during this two month period included: detonation of a car bomb in Ameriyah-Ferris' central market that resulted in nine deaths and 35 wounded in early October; the assassinations of two moderate imams in Saqlawiya on October 9 and November 24; three large explosions in and around the provincial government complex and main hospital in Ramadi which killed over 20 in mid-October; attacks damaging two highway bridges connecting Fallujah with Ramadi and Baghdad; and the assassination by sticky bomb of an Abu Ghraib council member visiting Garma on October 23. In addition, several Iraqi army and police were killed or injured, including: four soldiers killed and 14 wounded in an IED attack on their convoy on October 17 and a triple bombing in mid-November at the private Fallujah residences of three police officers, resulting in 14 injured, including children. (NOTE: In 2004 and 2005, insurgents sought to destroy the road connections into and out of Fallujah in an effort to isolate the city from the rest of the country. END NOTE)

FALLUJAH CITY PERSPECTIVES

15. (C) Radio Fallujah journalists told e-PRTOffs in an off-the-record meeting in late October that the public was angry, fearful, and felt powerless and deeply discouraged by events. The public blamed government leaders at all levels for the return of violence. Many felt that government officials scapegoated Al Qaeda in Iraq and Ba'athists for bombings that may actually have been internecine political battles among government elites, according to the Radio Fallujah contacts. They thought that a majority of local citizens, disillusioned, had no desire to vote in the upcoming elections, though they also noted that Fallujah Mayor Saad Awad Rashid Al-Dulaymi remained popular.

(COMMENT. Radio Fallujah has historically supported the mayor in an ongoing power struggle in Fallujah between the mayor and the chief of police, who is responsible for security. END COMMENT.)

16. (C) Mayor Saad predicted a continued higher level of violence leading up to the election, and said that this would sharply depress voter turnout. Saad also shared his mistrust of the central government in Baghdad, which he considered overly influenced by Iran -- a common complaint in Sunni Fallujah. Saad was contemptuous of the current Council of Representatives, whose members he predicted would protect their own interests by enacting a closed list system, in spite of a clear public demand for open lists, and that they would abuse this system to further their own corrupt interests. (NOTE: The election law currently under debate calls for an open list electoral process. END NOTE.)

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AMIRIYAH-FERRIS MEETINGS

17. (C) E-PRTOffs met Amiriyah-Ferris leaders three times recently -- Council Chairman Shakir M. Obaid in early October, and then both Shakir and Mayor Fala Younus Hassan in mid-October and then again in November. In the early October meeting, Shakir was upset by the October 6 bomb attack in Amiriyah-Ferris's central market, but reported a strong public reaction to stand firm against terror. By mid-October, Shakir and Fala were much more anxious, following the four significant attacks on October 16 and 17. They said they feared a dangerous spiral of violence, and sharply criticized the Iraqi security forces, some of whom they suspected of complicity. Fala and Shakir reported that public confidence had been shattered by the string of attacks. By November, the two men were calmer and reported a somewhat more relaxed public mood, as a bit of time had passed since the latest incidents. Fala commented that cross-sectarian political coalitions are the most hopeful signal for Iraq's future. (COMMENT. Shakir and Fala are dynamic and promising young local administrators, and are reliable e-PRT interlocutors. Shakir is scheduled for an IVLP in 2010. END COMMENT.)

VIEWS FROM SAQLAWIYA

18. (C) In the midst of the large bombings in mid-October, e-PRTOffs met with Sheikh Abdullah al-Mohamedhi, who heads the Sahwa organization in Saqlawiya and seems to be de facto security czar for Saqlawiya, exercising informal sway over Iraqi security forces in the area in addition to serving on the town council. Saqlawiya previously had been the most stable, secure, and quiet part of Greater Fallujah. Sheikh Abdullah bemoaned the US-Iraqi Security Agreement which caused US forces to stop patrolling in Iraq's cities after June 30. Sheikh Abdullah attributed the violence to intense competition among would-be political leaders -- several of whom he said are connected to competing terrorist/insurgent

groups -- each seeking to eliminate rivals before the upcoming election. Another purpose of the attacks, in his view, was specifically to shake public confidence in current government leaders' ability to maintain order. (COMMENT. Sheikh Abdullah also objected to MNF-W's withdrawal from the city in late 2008, protests that may have had as much to do with declining US CERP and direct-contract awards as security concerns. In addition, some of the "political competition" described by Abdullah may in fact be a smokescreen for criminal activity. END COMMENT.)

¶9. (C) Engineer Khalid Hamadi, a business association leader who also heads the e-PRT-funded municipal planning office in Saqlawiya, commented that public cynicism was high. In a meeting in late October, Hamadi claimed that many Fallujans believed government officials were actually behind the Ramadi bridge bombing, motivated by a desire to embezzle funds when the bridge is rebuilt. Khalid accused tribal sheikhs of being a corrupting influence in local politics, and thus at the root of instability. In a meeting two weeks later, he elaborated that elections, the US military's withdrawal, and unemployment were responsible in equal parts for the perception of increased violence. Khalid, like Amiriyah-Ferris Mayor Fala, commented that the public had been encouraged by recent moves by political leaders to form cross-sectarian political coalitions for the elections, which was a hopeful indicator the political spectrum was moving beyond sectarianism.

AGRICULTURAL OFFICIALS SHARE THEIR VIEWS

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¶10. (C) E-PRT local contacts from the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) offered another perspective, which had also become more negative. The MOA division chiefs for three sub-districts -- two together and one independently -- told e-PRTOffs that they no longer felt safe visiting the e-PRT on base, as they have long been doing, because of fears of insurgent surveillance outside the gate. Separately, a non-government e-PRT grantee for crop extension projects refused to make follow-up visits to farm areas south of Saqlawiya because he felt those areas had become unsafe following the rash of security incidents.

HIGH ALERT HAS ITS COSTS

¶11. (C) The ramped-up presence of Iraqi security forces across the district by early November also had its consequences. Engineer Khalid commented, for example, that his early November trip to Baghdad -- normally about an

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hour's journey -- took four hours each way because of police checkpoints. Mayor Fala reported that local police were burning through fuel and food at a much higher rate than budgeted because of the much-increased number of checkpoints and patrols.

SECURITY STATISTICS MIXED

¶12. (C) When considering the recent spate of high profile attacks, monthly levels of attacks within the province have remained relatively stable during 2009, with average attacks down to between 53 and 57 events per month since June 30th. This drop could be attributed at least partially to increased and improved intelligence sharing and cooperation between the Iraqi Army, Iraqi Police, and Iraqi Special Forces, as well as intelligence sharing between US forces and the Iraqis.

¶13. (C) However, while the number of incidents may be low, their lethal and spectacular nature may signal a change. According to MNF-W's statistics, seven local nationals were killed and 44 wounded in Anbar as a result of security

incidents in five-month period from February 1 to June 30; the number jumped to up to 80 killed and nearly 300 wounded for the period from July 1 (after the pull-out of US troops from Anbar's cities) to November 23. Thus while the number of incidents appears to have decreased, they have become more deadly.

COMMENT: PERCEPTIONS AND STATISTICS

¶14. (C) Fallujah remains one of the most fragile areas in Anbar, and although the city has made significant progress since 2005, its stability is delicate. That said, no major incidents have occurred in recent weeks. In these October-November meetings, key interlocutors expressed real concerns about security threats emanating from a variety of possible sources, including political and criminal, as well as insurgent, elements. A variety of interlocutors from sectors as diverse as agriculture, business, the media, the local government and even a Sunni Arab tribal militia raised these concerns. It is a broad group, but most Iraqis have self-interested motives when speaking to us, and we must be careful to consider those motives in each instance.

FORD